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## **HOW WELL DO WE RECOGNIZE SATAN'S INFLUENCE?**

In reference to Satan the Apostle Paul wrote that "we are not ignorant of his (Satan's) devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). The Greek word here rendered "devices" is "noema", a word that is derived from "nous", which means "the mind". Thus the Greek word "noema" means: thoughts, mental processes, schemes to deceive, etc.". The Unabridged Edition of Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary includes in its definition of the English word "device" the expressions "**an underhanded scheme, a trick**". So in this context the Greek word "noema" and the English word "devices" convey basically the same idea ... thought processes which have the goal of deceiving people.

In this verse Paul is saying that we in God's Church should be aware of Satan's devious and perverse ways of thinking and reasoning, which perverse ways of thinking underlie all of his dealings with mankind; they underlie his influences on society in general, and they also underlie his ways of specifically tempting true Christians to sin against God.

So what about you? Are you aware of where and how Satan influences us human beings? Are you aware of Satan's underhanded scheming and his devices, or are they hidden from you? In order to effectively confront and deal with problems we must be able to identify how Satan works in society in general and also in our own specific environment. We cannot afford to be ignorant of his devices.

## **THE HUMAN EXISTENCE**

All our activities and all our endeavors fall into one or more of only three basic categories, namely 1) WHAT WE SAY, 2) WHAT WE DO, and 3) WHAT WE THINK.

Everything in our human life experiences boils down to our thoughts, words and deeds. Specifically, it boils down to:

- 1) not only WHAT we think, but also **HOW** we think,
- 2) not only WHAT we say, but also WHY and HOW we say it,
- 3) not only WHAT we do, but also WHY and HOW we do it.

In general terms it is "how" we think, say and do things that reveals our real motivations. Thus the "how" or the "why" is in most cases more important than the "what".

In our context of wanting to understand Satan's devices, the most basic point we need to keep in mind is that Satan influences, or at least attempts to influence, all human beings in all three of these areas on a regular and more or less permanent basis.

In the Old Testament there is one word that is used repeatedly to typify the whole human life experience, and that is the word **WALK**. To get anywhere we must walk. Walking represents how we live our lives. And so we are told that Enoch and Noah "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22; 6:9). God told Abraham to "walk before Me" (Genesis 17:1). And when Jesus Christ will rule over this earth, then "all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Eternal our God forever and

ever" (Micah 4:5). The prophet Amos asked the rhetorical question "can two walk together, except they be agreed?".

In the Bible walking is used to represent the whole human life experience; it includes everything we think and say and do.

## **THE WORLD WE LIVE IN**

Consider **2 Corinthians 4:3-4**.

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom **the god of this world** (Greek "**aionos**") hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

This was written by the Apostle Paul. This verse is an expression of what Paul himself was thinking. Now consider this: Paul was not afraid to use the word "god" (Greek "theos") to refer to Satan. Would YOU have done that? Or would you have been afraid to ever use the word "theos" for anyone other than God the Father and Jesus Christ? It is not as if God Almighty somehow told Paul to here use the word "theos" for Satan; it was really Paul's own idea to here describe Satan with the word "theos". I mean, Paul could have said something like "the RULER (Greek "archon") of this age" instead of saying "the GOD (Greek "theos") of this age", and we would still have known exactly who Paul was referring to. Or Paul could have referred to Satan as "the KING (Greek "basileus") of this age", a title that would be compatible with other places where the word "king" is used or implied in reference to Satan (e.g. Ezekiel 28:12; Matthew 12:24-26; etc.).

But Paul didn't do that. And God accepted Paul's use of the word "theos" in reference to Satan in this context.

So Paul here referred to Satan as "the god of this age". The question is: in what way is Satan "a god"? He is a god because he controls things to a high degree. And what does Satan control? He controls what human beings think and say and do ... he controls how human beings "walk"! Specifically, Satan largely controls what people **think** and how people think; he controls what people **say** and why and how they say it; and he controls what people **do** and also why and how they do it. It is **this control** over all these things that makes Satan the god of this present age. All societies on earth are in this way under his control.

And this control that Satan exerts is on a higher level than being merely "the ruler or the king of this age". It is precisely because Satan's control over all these things is on such an extremely high level that Paul here used the word "god" to describe Satan's influence ... other words would have fallen short of conveying **the level of control** Satan has achieved over human beings.

Let's look at **Ephesians 2:1-3**.

"And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to **the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: **Among whom also we all had our conversation** (Greek "anestrophemen") in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

The Greek verb "anastrepho", used here by Paul (i.e. "had our conversation"), literally means "to turn

back". Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words states that in the passive voice (which is what we have in this verse) this Greek verb refers to how we conduct ourselves, "**indicating one's manner of life and character**". In other words, this is the NT Greek equivalent of the OT Hebrew word for "walk" when used to refer to the whole human life experience. So in Old Testament terms we might paraphrase Ephesians 2:3 as saying: "the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all WALKED in times past ...".

In regard to Ephesians 2 we should ask: in WHOM does Satan work? The answer is: in all people who disobey God, but especially in the young (i.e. "in THE CHILDREN of disobedience"). And HOW does Satan work in these people? He controls how they walk; he controls their manner of life and character, by influencing what they think and say and do. And, as Paul states, we all walked in that way of life before coming into God's Church.

Later I will come back to this verse, as there is something else here that is extremely important, and which is easily overlooked. But for now let's move on.

Let's look at **Isaiah 3:12**.

"As for my people, **children are their oppressors**, and **women rule over them**. O my people, they which lead thee cause *thee* to err, and destroy the way of thy paths."

In this prophecy God predicted **two conditions** that would exist amongst "My people" in the latter times. These conditions characterize a society in which children oppress the adults, and in which women do the ruling. The way God presents these statements in this verse makes quite clear that these two conditions are displeasing to God, to put it mildly.

The question is: WHO is promoting these two conditions in our world today? The answer is that Satan is the one who actively promotes both of these conditions, because both of these conditions serve to enhance Satan's control over human beings; they reinforce his status as god of this age. His influence is always greatest in "the children of disobedience".

So HOW do children lead and oppress adults? In our age it started by Satan inspiring different nations to enact laws that make it a crime for parents to physically correct their children. Satan wants us to hate correction because he, Satan, hates correction. "Correction is grievous unto him that forsakes the (right) way" (Proverbs 15:10). This is especially true for Satan, even as it was true for the latter part of Solomon's life, the author of this proverb (see Ecclesiastes 4:13).

In making it illegal (in some countries) for parents to physically correct their disobedient children, Satan has taken away from parents their most effective tool to counter his influence. Godly child-rearing is at its most fundamental level a struggle between the parents and Satan as to who will control the mind of that child: Satan or the parents? Making it a crime to correct one's children in physical ways, as advocated in Scriptures like Proverbs 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; Hebrews 12:5-8; etc., has given Satan a huge advantage in this battle over the control of the minds of children. The primary goal of godly child-rearing is always to help the child to build restraints against unseen impulses sent to his mind by Satan. When the tool of physical correction is taken away from parents, Satan's ability to work in "the children of disobedience" is increased exponentially!

This has set the foundation for a society in which children can oppress adults. So in the absence of the potential for effective physical correction HOW do children oppress adults? They oppress their parents by being extremely demanding that their every wish be met, at the threat of sulking, screaming and temper tantrums, and by their demands to be treated as "the equals" of the adults. This selfish attitude in

children is frequently unconsciously fostered by parents who seek to provide every luxury possible for their children, with the result that the children grow up with high expectations of everything being provided for them. In this situation parents are oblivious to the principle that "it is good for a man **that he bear the yoke in his youth**" (Lamentations 3:27).

**Satan's perspective** here is that the more we receive without having to work for it, the more we should EXPECT to receive, and the more selfish and more demanding we become. As an illustration, it is no coincidence that America has given far more to other nations than any other nation in history; and at the same time America is hated by more people around the world than any other nation. That's how Satan influences people, to have contempt for those who are extremely generous towards us, and the more that is given to us, the more we demand to receive.

Of all the spirit beings God created, Satan was given the most by God ... staggering beauty (Ezekiel 28:17), the most prestigious position, that of a covering cherub (Ezekiel 28:14), even a throne (Isaiah 14:13). But it was never enough for Satan. He wanted more! He wanted the status and position of God the Father Himself (Isaiah 14:14). And this selfish demanding attitude is what Satan always tries to instill in human beings: the more that is freely given to us, the more we demand and expect to receive. This is a very common attitude, and it comes directly from Satan. It is the ultimate in ingratitude.

God tried one more time, this time on the human level, to see if lavishing luxuries upon a person will make that person appreciative of all these undeserved blessings. In this situation God was very selective: God tried this approach with an individual who up to that point in time had an excellent attitude towards God, as reflected by the statement that "the Eternal LOVED him" (2 Samuel 12:24). That individual was Solomon.

God told Solomon in a dream: ask what I shall give you (1 Kings 3:5). This is the identical approach many parents in our prosperous societies have taken today with their own children; they say to their children: just tell me what you want and I'll give it to you.

Solomon's response to God's offer was very fine and also unselfish; he asked God for understanding so that he could become a good leader of his nation. This response pleased God, and so God also gave Solomon extremely great riches and honor. God told Solomon: "I have also given you that which you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto you all your days" (1 Kings 3:13).

We all know the story. In the end Solomon then became one of the most selfish people to ever have walked on this earth! And on top of all the riches God freely gave to Solomon, Solomon still wanted more! Solomon imposed staggering taxes on his own people ... **he just couldn't get enough!** And he hated the thought of having to leave all his wealth to his own son, his heir. See Ecclesiastes 2:18 for this ultimate example of a selfish attitude. Regrettably this selfish attitude was Solomon's response to the incredible and totally undeserved blessings he had received from God. It should be easy to see WHO inspired this extremely selfish attitude in Solomon ... it was Satan!

(For more details on Solomon's utter selfishness see my two articles "Understanding the Book of Ecclesiastes" and "Understanding the Writings of Solomon".)

The point is that both, the spirit being to whom God gave the most (i.e. Satan) and the human being to whom God gave the most (i.e. Solomon), became utterly selfish, instead of becoming humbled and extremely grateful for God's undeserved blessings. This is an attitude that Satan projects very powerfully into people who receive great blessings without any obligations and without having to in any way work for those blessings. And this is something we should always keep in mind in rearing our children!

When parents give their children everything on a platter, when parents try to fulfill their children's every want and whim, then they are encouraging their children to develop an extremely selfish attitude, and they are aiding and abetting in instilling Satan's way of thinking in the minds of their children.

And further, when parents seek to do everything that their children demand, then the parents are clearly being oppressed. In this process Satan is using the children to enslave the parents. Satan inspires in children a lack of respect for the parents and for the wishes of the parents, when those same parents unintentionally encouraged selfishness and a lack of respect in their children in the first place.

Many parents give their children everything the children want, in an attempt to buy the children's love and affection. And all they have done is to entrench Satan's totally selfish perspective of life within their own children. They should have learned from the Beatles that "money can't buy me love"! And when children who are used to getting everything they want are suddenly denied something, then a temper tantrum is frequently the response.

A temper tantrum by anyone, child or adult, is always an unmistakable sign that the individual is being manipulated by Satan, because tantrums amount to relinquishing control over one's mind. Note! Being denied something they really want is frequently enough of a challenge to cause some people to lose control over their own minds. And when we relinquish control over our own minds, then Satan always steps into the void and takes over the control we have just relinquished. And Satan stays in control of such a mind until the individual involved reasserts full control over his own mind, by resolutely enforcing control over his own temper.

Never before has the statement "as for My people, children are their oppressors" been truer than in our world today. Never before has the under 20 years of age segment of the population had such an extremely powerful influence on virtually every aspect of life for the whole of society: its foods, dress codes, manner of speaking, entertainment, recreational activities, politics, commerce, the internet, the cell phone culture, immoral conduct, etc. ... in all of these things "children" are a major influence, and they are the ones who establish the standards. They demand that all of society "walk" as they walk. That's the "oppression" God speaks about in Isaiah 3:12.

To further strengthen his hold over "the children of disobedience" Satan actively promotes a generation gap between parents and children. He has deceived us into believing that such a generation gap is a perfectly natural phenomenon, when it is primarily a manifestation of Satan exerting his influence on the minds of children. And yes, in the presence of Satan's influence, in the presence of the god who controls virtually all aspects of our daily lives, it is indeed "perfectly natural" to find a generation gap between parents and children; it is certainly just as "natural" as it is for the carnal mind to be enmity against God (see Romans 8:7).

Sometimes we find that grandparents feel that "it is my right TO SPOIL my grandchildren ... that's what grandparents are for, right?" And they don't understand, or sometimes just don't want to know, that "to spoil" really means "TO IMPAIR THE CHARACTER OF SOMEONE by overindulgence or by excessive praise". "To spoil" our children and our grandchildren is a very pro-active way of achieving Isaiah 3:12. And spoiling our children always carries Satan's unconditional 10-year warranty ... that's how confident Satan is of his product in this area. (Okay, I have just made up this "10-year warranty", but for all practical purposes it might as well be true.)

The second condition Isaiah 3:12 mentions is that "women rule over them", a reverse of God's statement in Genesis 3:16. This too is something Satan actively promotes because it also strengthens his position as god of this age. Isaiah 3:12 predicted that the time would come when the wife would be "the boss" in a majority of families amongst "My people". This trend has assuredly not been God's doing, as is very clear from the second part of this verse, which reads "O My people, they which lead you CAUSE YOU

TO ERR, AND DESTROY THE WAY OF YOUR PATHS". And it is also clear that this condition is today very prevalent in our western culture.

If we want to correctly identify Satan's influence in the world around us, then we must also be aware of these particular trends. We should be able to see Satan's hand in this.

Now let's look at **Revelation 12:9**.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and **Satan**, which **deceiveth the whole world**: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

The first question here is: **WHO** has Satan deceived? On some points Satan has deceived ALL PEOPLE, including you and including me. But on most points Satan has deceived especially the people who disobey God. The next question is: **HOW** has Satan deceived people? He has deceived people by strongly influencing how and what people think and speak and do, by influencing how they "walk".

Before we can overcome any deception we must first realize that we have indeed been deceived by Satan. Without this realization we will remain enslaved to deception. It is only the truth that can make us free (**John 8:32**). It follows that in every area where we at present do not yet have all the truth, we are still to some degree "deceived". And the world around us is deceived to a far greater degree than we in God's Church are deceived. But we in God's Church have never been completely immune from Satan's deceptions.

A vital key for us to always keep in mind is that Satan's rule as god of this age utterly depends on deception! When all of Satan's deceptions have been exposed, then his rule as a "god" will also have been broken, because it is the truth which sets us free from Satan's power. And it is the truth that will expose that Satan isn't really a "god" at all; he is just an imposter, like a magician who uses mirror images to create illusions.

This situation is specifically discussed in Isaiah 14. In verse 15 God states that Satan will be "brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit"; in other words, Satan is defeated and everything about him will be totally exposed! When that happens, then people will understand that Satan is really a nobody on a huge ego trip, who was faking it all along, by persuading us human beings to accept his ways of thinking, and convincing us that he is a being of enormous power. Notice:

"They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, *and* consider thee, *saying*, **Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?" (Isaiah 14:16)**

People are going to say: is this really the individual who has caused all these huge problems? Why, he doesn't really have any power at all, just look at him!

An analogy that might illustrate this point more vividly is a lion-tamer. Recall the big ring circus acts, where one lion-tamer, armed with nothing more than a whip and a small stick, would control 3 or 4 mature lions and make them perform specific acts. Now the whole show depends on that lion-tamer getting the lions to accept false premises. He has to convince the lions that he is stronger and more powerful than they are, and that his cracking whip is a powerful weapon. THE TRUTH is that, whip or no whip and stick or no stick, those lions could EASILY tear that lion-tamer (or any other men) into pieces, as happened in Daniel 6:24! But the lions don't know that. They have been conditioned to seeing that lion-tamer as more powerful than themselves, and they don't know the truth.

Satan exerting his control over human beings is somewhat like that lion-tamer! He doesn't REALLY have any power over us, and this is proved by the fact that we CAN "resist" Satan (James 4:7), something that would be impossible if he really did have power over us. But he has convinced us that he has the power to overcome us. And we have been blinded to the fact that, with access to God's Holy Spirit, the power on our side is far, far superior to anything Satan has ... it is like a lion on our side (see Revelation 5:5) being confronted by a puny little stick and a little whip on Satan's side. It is really no contest at all, and when the truth is understood (i.e. the false premises have been removed) people will see just how powerless Satan really is! He has DECEIVED "the whole world" into attributing far more power to him than he actually has! He is a deceiver! His power depends a great deal on persuading human beings to do his work for him. But we also have the power to refuse to allow ourselves to be influenced by Satan.

We should always remember that Satan's power to influence us is only as great as we allow it to be.

That brings us to **2 Corinthians 11:3**.

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so **your minds should be corrupted** from the simplicity that is in Christ."

HOW does Satan corrupt minds? Satan corrupts not just what we think; he goes one step further and he corrupts **HOW we think!** Satan ensures that we always think from a selfish and subjective point of view, a point of view that is based on terribly flawed premises and perceptions! This is in contrast to an objective and God-centered point of view which is based on the right premises.

Note!

**THE PERSPECTIVE** from which we approach any given subject has the greatest and most profound impact on the decisions and conclusions we will reach!

If we start from a wrong perspective, then no amount of facts and no amount of logic and sound reasoning will lead us to accept the correct conclusions! Most of the disagreements amongst us in the churches of God are not due to a lack of factual objective information. No, most of those disagreements are due to us approaching these matters from conflicting and seemingly irreconcilable perspectives!

Satan knows that it is far more effective for him to deceive us regarding HOW we think (i.e. the perspectives we adopt before we even approach any given question) than it is for him to deceive us about the actual facts of the matter. Objective facts are only of value if we are willing to approach any question from the right perspective.

The process of God opening our minds to His truth is primarily one of enabling us to view facts from a different perspective, different from the perspectives Satan has coerced and badgered all mankind to accept and to inculcate into our very beings. It is **those perspectives**, all of which in one form or another represent Satan's point of view, that **enslave mankind**. And once God has freed us from those perspectives, then our minds are open, THEN we can recognize the truth God makes available to us.

Thus when you are in an argument with people who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the facts you are so forcefully and irrefutably presenting to them ... just remember that you yourself were at one point in time in their position, where you were that "lion" who did the lion-tamer's bidding because he had convinced you that he is more powerful than you. At that point you yourself couldn't see the things that are now clear to you, simply because you had been led into approaching things from a wrong perspective. So try to understand that such people simply will NEVER acknowledge your facts unless

and until they have a change of perspective, which we might also call "a change of heart".

Satan's influence regarding HOW people think is far more profound than we tend to realize! It is **how** people think (i.e. their perspective) that Satan has corrupted and perverted, because that is the precise experience that Satan himself went through. In Ezekiel 28:17 God tells us that Satan "CORRUPTED YOUR WISDOM BY REASON OF YOUR BRIGHTNESS". In plain language, Satan's great beauty and splendor led to Satan adopting a completely different perspective of himself. Because that new perspective of himself was corrupt, therefore his wisdom was also corrupted in the same process. And this is the precise process Satan uses on mankind, coercing us to accept perspectives that are fatally flawed and ungodly.

Perhaps you yourself have at times noticed how some people, who once were zealous members of the Church but who then dropped out completely, seem to have completely lost the understanding they used to have. Have you ever noticed something like that? Well, the reason for their loss of understanding is very simple. When someone adopts perspectives and premises that are wrong, then they AUTOMATICALLY lose all the understanding that is based on seeing life from a godly perspective. So the next time you meet someone who used to be in the Church but who now has lost all the understanding he used to have ... understand that you are looking at someone who has accepted a different perspective on obedience to God, and EVERYTHING that was based on the previous godly perspective has been lost, and without a return to the previously accepted perspective it can never be restored.

Perceiving a totally changed way of thinking in people is the most powerful evidence that they have "let go" of the premises and perspectives they had willingly accepted while they were a part of God's Church, evidence that they now have a completely different perspective on life.

And once Satan has corrupted how we think, then that will also automatically corrupt what we say and what we do, and why we say and do those things. Our thoughts precede our words and our actions. That is why "the prince of the power of the air" can focus his primary attention on corrupting how we think, guiding and directing us into accepting wrong perspectives and false premises for what we will think and say and do.

The important point here is to understand that we ourselves don't even realize that our minds have indeed been corrupted by Satan. The Greek word for "corrupted" in 2 Corinthians 11:3 basically means: to destroy through the effect of evil company. This "present evil world" (**Galatians 1:4**) has powerfully influenced how we think and the perspectives we adopt. We are mostly unaware of the way our thinking has been shaped and molded by the society in which we find ourselves, and we view our own thinking as objective and unbiased, never perceiving just how much Satan has pressured us into lowering our standards from what God would really like to see in us.

Our situation is somewhat like that of the frog in the fictional story about the frog in the pot of lukewarm water that is ever so gradually being brought to the boil ... we don't realize how much hotter things have become than even just a decade or two ago, because these changes have gradually crept up on us.

As **1 Corinthians 15:33** says, "evil communications (Greek = company) corrupt good manners". And are we ever in evil company in this present age! When Lot moved into Sodom the evil company there rubbed off on Lot, even as the evil company of our society today (which is very similar to Sodom) rubs off on us. We need to recognize that bad company ALWAYS has a negative effect on those who are exposed to it. That includes you and me!

This point is illustrated by God the Father NEVER allowing Satan to come into His presence. Since he first sinned Satan has NEVER had any direct contact with God the Father, because God the Father will



simply not allow sin to exist in His presence. That is also one reason WHY this present universe has to "melt with fervent heat" and pass away completely (2 Peter 3:10), because this present universe has witnessed and experienced sins, and God the Father will not come into the presence of sin or its consequences.

Satan fully controls the world around us ... we are living on Satan's turf, so to speak. And for us it is impossible to completely avoid exposure to "evil company".

## **THE PROCESS OF SINNING**

Now let's consider the process of sinning. This is explained in **James 1:13-16**.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: **But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed**. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren."

God never tempts us to break His laws. The process of sinning always starts in the mind (except for "sins of ignorance", which we need not consider here). Sinning starts with a thought. And it also typically involves a wrong way of thinking, viewing the temptation facing us from one or other wrong perspective.

The temptation, that thought, when viewed from a wrong perspective frequently results in us being drawn away from the fear of God. And whenever we are drawn away from the fear of God, then our minds have also automatically been corrupted. It is our way of thinking that has been changed when we are drawn away from the fear of God. (The corollary here is that if we can just manage to view every temptation from the right and godly perspective (i.e. from the right way of thinking), then there is also a greater motivation to resist the temptation to break God's laws.)

It is this changed way of thinking, this changed perspective of the situation, that James refers to with the word "enticed". **Satan has enticed us to see the whole temptation from a different point of view**. Where the correct perspective sees the prospect of breaking one of God's laws as scary (i.e. a fear to knowingly transgress), the changed point of view sees this prospect as offering us something desirable and attractive (the apparent fruits of sin), with PERHAPS the possibility of some negative side-effects. At the same time Satan then seduces us into being attracted to gambling ... we consider gambling that we can get away without those negative side-effects affecting us in any way, like the smoker who gambles that he won't get lung cancer.

Can we understand that when we are enticed, we have in effect accepted a completely different perspective of the whole situation? And it is always Satan's goal in all the temptations he throws our way to get us **to change our way of thinking**.

**The right way of thinking is our strongest weapon against all temptations to break the laws of God.**

James continued to point out that once we have accepted a wrong way of thinking (i.e. we have been enticed), then it is only a question of time before we sin in our words and/or actions; i.e. "it brings forth sin".

James concluded this thought by saying "don't be fooled" (i.e. "do not err"), because a wrong way of thinking will inevitably lead to wrong actions. To get us to sin, Satan must first corrupt the way we think.

In **Galatians 5:19-21** Paul enumerated a partial list of "the works of the flesh". Here "works" refers primarily to our actions, deeds and conduct. We are familiar with this list. What we should note in this context is that all of them start with a wrong thought, or to be more accurate, they start with a wrong perspective, a wrong way of thinking. They are the ways of the world around us, the society in which we live, and which society is Satan's medium for getting us to accept this wrong way of thinking, and to then turn the wrong thoughts that bombard our minds into "the works of the flesh".

As long as we accept Satan's wrong way of thinking, that ungodly perspective on life, it will always be a major struggle to resist turning some of those wrong thoughts into "the works of the flesh". Our resistance has to start long before the actual thoughts of temptation enter our minds; our resistance has to start with a changed way of thinking.

Consider **James 4:7**.

**"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."**

So HOW do we resist the devil? Let's understand that to resist "DOING wrong" is really our last resort! That is often just our last ditch effort. And certainly, to still resist at that stage is far, far better than to give in to the temptation, whatever it may be.

But we really need to **resist Satan preemptively!** Preemptive resistance involves two steps. They are:

1) We SUBMIT to God, which really means that WE ACCEPT GOD'S PERSPECTIVE into our minds. We do this by rejecting Satan's perspective of life, Satan's wrong and selfish ways of thinking! In order to be able to do this, we must recognize Satan's influence all around us, including in some of the things we ourselves tend to do almost "habitually"!

Satan is very deceptive, and many of his wrong selfish ways of thinking are carefully disguised as "it's okay to love yourself as much as you are supposed to love others". It is only a very careful and objective evaluation that will expose that "loving ourselves as much as we are supposed to love others" in practice quite often amounts to having to love others considerably less than we love ourselves ... or we simply won't attain whatever it is that we are striving for. It is a difficult thing for us to recognize that in such situations we are frequently still being guided by a wrong way of thinking.

This step is absolutely vital if we are to resist Satan preemptively! We must firmly reject his false premises, his false perspectives, before any specific temptation even reaches our minds. That will go a long way towards taking the approach Solomon advocated in **Proverbs 22:3** ("a prudent man foresees the evil and hides himself").

2) Then comes step two, which is that we must resist the wrong thoughts Satan puts into our minds. Those wrong thoughts Paul referred to in **Ephesians 6:16** as "the fiery darts of the wicked". Here the Greek expression "tou ponerou" is in the masculine genitive singular case, and it really means "of the wicked one", singular! Satan is that "wicked one", and this expression refers to the wicked thoughts of temptations that Satan constantly fires at our minds. If we dwell on those thoughts, if we entertain them, then we have already lost half the battle. Do you know why?

In this situation we have already lost half the battle because, even if we end up resisting the temptation, by entertaining it in our minds for some time it demonstrates that we are still accepting Satan's wrong way of thinking. It is acceptance of that wrong way of thinking that shows that half the battle is already lost.

Now consider the following point.

It is when we reject his wrong ways of thinking, his wrong premises and wrong perspectives, that THEN Satan will flee from us! If we still accept Satan's wrong ways of thinking, but just resist acting on the wrong thoughts inherent in the temptations Satan sends our way, then Satan will NOT flee from us! That is because as long as we accept his wrong ways of thinking Satan knows that sooner or later we will also give in and entertain the wrong thoughts, which in turn lead to the wrong words and deeds.

To be clear here:

It is only when we reject Satan's wrong ways of thinking, which are the foundation on which all the specific temptations he sends our way are built, that then Satan "will flee from us".

You have undoubtedly experienced this yourself at one time or another. You were tempted to do something that is wrong before God. You understood that it is wrong, and you dutifully "resisted" doing the wrong. However, Satan and the temptation didn't go away; they were still with you. You may even have asked God to drive Satan away from you. But the thought of the temptation continued to plague you, and eventually you gave in and sinned. Does that sound familiar?

In this situation the problem was not that you hadn't resisted the wrong deed for some time; the problem was not that the promise inherent in the last part of James 4:7 was not being fulfilled. The problem was that while you resisted (for a period of time) doing the wrong deed, you were nevertheless still actively accepting Satan's wrong way of thinking, his wrong selfish perspectives. And Satan KNEW that you were still accepting his perspectives, and therefore he was not about to flee from you. No, on the contrary, when Satan could see (i.e. discern) your continued acceptance of his way of thinking, then he just intensified his efforts to get you to sin, and eventually you caved in, right?

This is what Paul was speaking about in **Romans 12:2**.

"And be not conformed to this world: but **be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

It is the ways we think (our perspectives and our premises) that have to change, if our minds are to be renewed. And unless our minds are actually renewed in this way, Satan will never really flee from us. The primary focus must be on the mind and the premises it accepts, HOW it thinks and reasons; and the focus on the outward actions is only secondary to this primary focus. Satan can recognize whether we accept his premises in our ways of thinking or not.

Jesus Christ made the same point in **Matthew 16:24**.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, **let him deny himself**, and take up his cross, and follow me."

The way we "deny ourselves" is by rejecting Satan's way of thinking, by rejecting Satan's perspectives and his premises. One of the premises Satan utterly relies on is that "all that a man has will he give for his life" (**Job 2:4**). And therefore Satan uses the "fear of death" to enslave people. See **Hebrews 2:15**. Now that is a false and ungodly perspective. The godly counterpart to this wrong way of thinking was spelled out by Jesus Christ in **John 15:13** ("greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"), and in **Matthew 16:25** ("whosoever will save his life shall lose it ..."). The contrast

between Job 2:4 and Hebrews 2:15 on the one hand and John 15:13 and Matthew 16:25 on the other hand vividly illustrates the two opposing ways of thinking, the two completely opposite perspectives on life.

We cannot walk with Satan and somehow expect to be immune to his way of seeing life, his way of thinking. See Amos 3:3 for this principle. This means that we need to examine our lives for where we might be "walking with Satan", i.e. where the way we think and reason is unfortunately fully compatible with the way Satan thinks and reasons.

### **THE MATTER OF SPEAKING**

We cannot speak without a thought being present first. However, we CAN speak without us ourselves providing that thought! The actual thought that is essential for us to speak can come from AN OUTSIDE SOURCE! In plain English: worldwide there are innumerable occasions when the thoughts that are verbalized by someone did not originate in that individual's mind; no, those thoughts were conveniently provided by Satan to that individual's mind at just the right instant. That's "the power of the air".

An example: Some people are quick thinkers and they can instantly answer many questions posed to them (e.g. a spontaneous correct answer to a somewhat complicated mathematical question). There assuredly is nothing wrong with being quick witted. And so I don't want what I am about to explain to be confused with occasions when someone is simply quick witted.

But there are also very many people who will SPONTANEOUSLY contradict statements someone else is making. With these "**spontaneous contradictions**" it is often quite obvious that such people are not yet aware of all the facts that pertain to the statement that is being made; but they cannot, it seems, refrain from contradicting the other person anyway. Here we are certainly not speaking about "quick witted responses".

This brings us back to Ephesians chapter 2.

### **ANOTHER LOOK AT EPHESIANS 2:2**

Here is this verse again.

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in **the children of disobedience**."

Until now we have freely used this expression "the children of disobedience". Let's look at this expression more closely. The Greek text here reads "en tois huiois tes apeitheias". The key word here is "**apeitheias**", which is the genitive singular of the feminine noun "apeitheia". The noun "apeitheia", in turn, is derived from the adjective "apeithes".

Now Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the NT defines "apeithes" as: impersuasive, uncompliant and contumacious. These English words mean: **not yielding to arguments, obstinate opposition**, etc. Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words defines "apeithes" as: **unwilling to be persuaded**, spurning belief, disobedient. Vine's defined the noun "apeitheia" as: the condition of being unpersuadable, denoting **obstinate rejection** of the will of God. Thayer and Vine are agreed on these words.

Are you beginning to see what Paul was really telling us when he spoke about Satan as "the spirit that now works in the children of DISOBEDIENCE"?

It is not that "disobedience" is a wrong translation of the word "apeitheia". However, we should recognize that "disobedience" is in our context a rather poor translation! It is a poor translation because it still disguises to some extent what Paul was really telling us with this statement.

A far better translation of the expression "en tois huiois tes apeitheias" in our context is "**in the sons of OBSTINATE OPPOSITION**".

In other words, Satan works in all those people who **SPONTANEOUSLY** and **OBSTINATELY** **resist** every sound argument that is presented to them; they are characterized by **an unwillingness to be persuaded!** That is not just a single act of disobedience; it is really a spirit of deliberate and consistent disobedience or opposition.

We need to understand that Satan is the author of spontaneous contradictions to information, whether that information is complete or whether that information is still incomplete. THE THOUGHT to contradict what is being said simply appeared in the minds of those people, without them themselves having had to do anything to generate that thought. It was spontaneously available to them, and instead of bringing that thought "into captivity" (see 2 Corinthians 10:5) they simply verbalized it, in effect adopting the attitude inherent in that thought as their own attitude.

Consider: it is precisely because many of our thoughts aren't really "ours" at all until we accept them, that the Apostle Paul instructs us to "bring every thought into captivity"! We need to recognize that **MANY** of the thoughts that appear in our minds didn't even originate in our own minds; they were "provided" to our minds by "the prince of the power of the air" with the explicit motivation of wanting to deceive us about the real source of these thoughts, in order to get us to accept them as our own.

There are many people who will argue against almost everything they are told. If you say "it's big", they'll say "no, it's not big at all"; and if you say "it's small", they'll say "actually it is quite big"; when you say "up" then they say "down"; when you say "it's hot today", they'll say "no, I don't think it's hot at all", etc. Whatever position you take on any issue, it seems that they almost always spontaneously take an opposing position.

### **THAT'S WHAT PAUL IS DESCRIBING FOR US IN EPHESIANS 2:2!**

We can easily observe this "obstinate opposition" in small children that are left without correction. When you say "give", then they don't want to give; when you say "come", then they don't want to come; when you say "eat", then they don't want to eat; when you say "go to sleep", then they don't want to sleep; when you say "no", then they don't want to accept your "no" instruction, etc. They are spontaneously contrary, and they most certainly have not yet brought any of their thoughts "into captivity". It is this type of "consistent disobedience" that is pinpointed in Ephesians 2:2. The generation gap is another manifestation of this obstinate opposition.

It goes far beyond simple occasional disobedience. It is really a case of spontaneous and obstinate opposition to whatever they are being told. That is the spirit Paul has identified for us with this statement in Ephesians 2:2.

This spontaneous contrariness is probably the most pervasive attitude we find in our world today, emanating directly from Satan himself! In these situations people never have to think out their contrary responses. As one person begins to speak (e.g. a man telling a story says "Last Thursday evening ..."), so the other person interjects with a spontaneous contradiction (e.g. the wife interjects "actually it was Wednesday evening, dear"). The actual subject matter being discussed is really immaterial. It is **A**

## **SPIRIT OF SPONTANEOUS CONTRADICTIONS!**

This spirit of spontaneous resistance to whatever is being said extends to all areas of life. We see it in families, on the job, in religious matters, in entertainment, in politics, in TV discussion panels, etc. Frequently there is an obstinate refusal to acknowledge facts or information that may be undesirable to the listener. Whenever we witness such a situation we need to realize that Satan is right there, stoking the fire. Satan inspires a spirit of obstinate opposition, demonstrating that he is indeed "the prince of the power of the air".

Take another example.

When someone has wronged us, treated us unfairly, taken advantage of us, or provoked and insulted us, etc. ... what happens with our minds? Why, we spontaneously have feelings of anger and resentment and hostility, etc. for the people responsible for the pain and suffering that has been inflicted upon us. Did we carefully think out our responses? No, of course not! Those thoughts were spontaneously provided to our minds by the spirit that was "a murderer from the beginning" (see John 8:44), without us having to put out any effort at all to think of these responses.

The response that comes "naturally" to a mind that accepts Satan's way of thinking is to revile those who revile us. The godly response was exemplified by Jesus Christ, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again" (1 Peter 2:23). These are two different ways of thinking, two different perspectives of the same factual situation.

### **WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THAT SATAN IS THE REAL AUTHOR OF ALL SPONTANEOUS NEGATIVE THOUGHTS THAT COME TO OUR MINDS!**

If we verbalize those negative thoughts, then we are "walking with Satan". And even when we only entertain those thoughts for a while, dwelling on them, then we are also "walking with Satan" for the period of time that we dwell on those thoughts.

Take the matter of entertainment: almost all of our entertainment revolves around breaking some of God's laws in one way or another. Think about this! We are entertained by stories and songs about people breaking laws of God. And when people violate God's laws and instructions (e.g. pleasant, nice-guy crooks, transvestites, smart aleck kids who get away with everything, weak husbands, adulterous heroes and heroines, etc.) we are expected to see that as "funny". And we don't realize how thoroughly and completely Satan dominates all our "leisure time". Many times we are a captive audience in front of a radio or TV set for Satan's perspectives on life, Satan's wrong ways of thinking. And you wondered why Hollywood is always at odds with the rest of the country, constantly presenting perverse scenarios to influence how we think about various perversions, making those involved in the perversions look like "nice normal people"? That's Satan's attempt to change our perspectives.

Similarly:

When something we are doing goes wrong (e.g. we miss that golf shot, we hit our fingers with a hammer, we reverse the car too far and get a dent in the back, etc.), then there are again IMMEDIATELY spontaneous thoughts in our minds that are not good. Many people in this world in a situation like this will spontaneously take God's name in vain, in effect blaming God for the mistake they have just made. Those thoughts at that moment in time were provided by "the prince of the power of the air". When we are in the presence of people who respond this way, we need to recognize that we are in the presence of people who very willingly accept Satan's way of thinking and behaving.

It is precisely because God said "you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7) that Satan provides such thoughts when people are under stress. It is when we are under stress that it becomes clear whether we still accept Satan's way of thinking, or whether we have rejected those wrong ways of thinking.

With this background we can now go back to **the two trees** in the Garden in Eden. The forbidden tree was the tree of the perception of good and evil. When they ate the fruit of that tree, it represented an acceptance of Satan's way of thinking, accepting his premises and his perspectives on life. With those premises and perspectives mankind was never going to see things God's way. It requires the fruit of the tree of life, which represented the gift of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to see through the flaws in Satan's way of thinking, so that we can then reject it from our minds.

The NT Greek word for "repent" literally means "to change the way we think". So when God commands us to repent, it means that we are commanded to make the decision to want to change our thinking away from Satan's selfish and perverse perspectives, and to try to see our lives from God's perspective. Our part in this is to RECOGNIZE that Satan's perspectives are wrong.

In **Isaiah 55:8-9** God tells us that "My thoughts are not your thoughts". What God is really saying with this statement is that HOW God thinks, the premises and the perspectives that underlie God's thinking, that is simply not the way we human beings naturally think; we naturally start from totally different perspectives and premises.

Once we have recognized that the premises in Satan's way of thinking are wrong, and we then make a commitment to reject that way of thinking, by repenting towards God (meaning that we show we want to think like God, but need God's help to be able to do so), then God gives us His Holy Spirit which **COVERTS OUR MINDS!**

The process of "conversion" is basically one of accepting a new way of thinking and rejecting our old way of thinking, made possible by the free gift of God's Spirit. It is God's Spirit that enables us to start to think like God. Our minds are "converted" from the old operating system (based on the premises and perspectives Satan promotes) to the new operating system (based on the premises and perspectives of God's way of thinking).

In order for us to really identify Satan's "devices", our minds first have to switch over to God's way of thinking, by accepting a completely different set of premises. With those new premises and perspectives guiding our thinking, THEN that will in turn influence what we say and what we do. The right speech and right actions follow the installing of the new way of thinking in our minds. Then we are in a position to correctly interpret and apply the facts that were (in many cases) at our disposal all along, but which our previous way of thinking, our previous perspectives, prevented us from understanding correctly. Then we can say with David:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:" (**Psalms 139:23**)

So what about you? Are you aware of Satan's devices, his devious and underhanded ways of trying to pressure us into holding fast to his wrong perspectives, his wrong premises, his wrong motivations, and the wrong attitudes he promotes?

In order to recognize "Satan's devices", we need to learn to identify HOW Satan coaches human beings to think, identifying the wrong premises and wrong perspectives he persuades mankind to accept. It is important to not give in to temptations to say or do something that is wrong. But it is even more important for us to identify the wrong, selfish and subjective ways of thinking that form the platform for all wrong

speech and wrong conduct. Real repentance involves changing that platform, rather than merely changing some of our conduct that was based on that platform.

We also need to identify situations where people are "the children of disobedience", because they stubbornly resist acknowledging any facts that are not to their liking, people who are totally unwilling to be persuaded by the facts, people who spontaneously contradict almost everything that is said. We should understand that there is a spirit that is working at coercing people to accept that type of mindset. And we need to identify conditions within society that reflect Satan's wrong way of thinking.

And from now onwards be on the lookout for people who spontaneously disagree with whatever is being said. Once you are actively looking for this, you'll be surprised how often you will notice this happening.

So are you able to recognize Satan's influence in this present world? And keep in mind that Satan can only influence you as much as you allow him to do so, and not one iota more.

Frank W. Nelte